**Self-Taught**

Preeti Vangani

I believe if I fixate over the last image of my body I sent him, this boy will magically respond. Arm outstretched, I wait in the balcony holding my cell way out into the airwaves through an iron square in the grill to catch better signal. Hear the leaky pressure cooker whistle. Mum hushes it, builds it up again. A controlled storm. One semi-nude makes you prude. Too many is needy. Elbow rooted on the sill, a family of ants migrate on to my body, think me a path. For their sake, I statue myself. Must I be ashamed of my skin and what it unfolds within, a teenage canvas forever pregnant with want? Am I not sexy enough to be replied to? I learnt the word sexy from a hit ‘cheap girl’ song the censor board stamped as vulgar, had sexy replaced. Mimicking that red corseted starlet’s moves in my petticoat, I knew I had to find a way to be sexy without ever thinking or saying I was. Until one night I wore a tube that sculpted my chest into two half-moons, awkwardly staring at the neon walls of a karaoke club. I was sweat, salt and bloody mary-ed. A man who's hand I memorized better than his face made a soup bowl with his hands, dropped his tongue into the emptiness. What song could I request then which meant 'Run, but not with your feet?' How my body can be a country at war with itself but also here in the promising balcony, a bridge for beings smaller than me, soldiering to find a dot of sugar for their hunger as I continue to wait for one beep of an answer from men to whom I unveil little by little, who I am.